DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 103 849 CS 201 901

AUTHOR Faggett, Harry Lee
TITLE Therapeutic Values in Writing-Laboratory Relationships.
PUB DATE Mar 75
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (26th, St. Louis, Missouri, March 13-15, 1975)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS *Composition (Literary); *Educational Therapy; English Instruction; Higher Education; Learning Experience; Student Teacher Relationship; *Teaching Methods; Therapeutic Environment; *Tutoring; *Writing Skills

ABSTRACT

In writing laboratories where theme-writing constitutes the central emphasis of the program, other developments may parallel the progress in language-usage improvement. Among these beneficial by-products of writing are self-identification, self-confidence, humanitarian concern, and aesthetic appreciation. Learning experiences in a tutorial system are most meaningful if confidential rapport is established between each student and the teacher. Every qualified tutor has to become a kind of unlicensed psychoanalyst who must realize that sincerity is the quality which makes a success of most student compositions. Many systems find the news media a good source of subject-matter for theme-writing. Four topics are suggested for possible use in the writing laboratory: An Open Letter to the People of Northern Ireland; To the Parents of Jewish Athletes Slaughtered at the Olympic Games; Where (and Why) Blacks Constitute a Majority in This Country (in lines waiting at the welfare offices); and The New Emphasis on Athletics for Women. (TS)

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED103849

CCCC of NCTE - Annual Conference, March 13 - 15, 1975

Panel: FINDING THE STUDENT THROUGH THE WRITING LABORATORY
(Friday, 10:45 - 12:45)

Title: Therapeutic Values in Writing-Laboratory Relationships

Speaker: Harry Lee Faggett
South Carolina State College
Orangeburg, South Carolina 29117

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Harry Lee Faggett
TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION. FURTHER REPRODUCTION OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM REQUIRES PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER.

CS 201 901

Harry Lee Faggett
State College
Orangeburg, S.C.

Therapeutic Values in Writing-Laboratory Relationships

In any writing laboratory where theme-writing constitutes the central emphasis of the program, a number of other developments may parallel any progress in language-usage improvement. Among these vicariously beneficial by-products of writing industry are (a)self-identification, (b)self-confidence, (c)humanitarian concern, and (d)aesthetic appreciation.

The injection here of a prefatory acknowledgement is positively mandatory: The classroom of every good teacher of composition is actually a writing laboratory.

Learning experiences in a tutorial system can be rendered tremendously meaningful if confidential rapport is established between each student and the tutor. Extensive, elaborate audio-visual paraphernalia; programmed instruction; myriad volumes of readers-and-writers, workbooks and handbooks; ideal writing conditions of time and place - all these may never serve a genuinely pragmatic purpose without the use of that tried-and-trusted instructional tool, acquaintanceship. Until the instructor and his student get to know each other, seldom does the process of learning begin. There is no substitute for teamwork, with mutual respect and understanding, in the development of the student's proficiency in language-usage.

Getting acquainted takes time. If a laboratory student has no regularly assigned tutor but simply works with anyone who

just happens to be on duty, he is handicapped by sheer diversity - of temperaments, instructional attitudes, concepts and methodology. As a matter of fact, two regular instructors operating in the same classroom most often create an atmosphere of discomfort, for themselves as well as the students. In the laboratory a student cannot serve any two(or more)masters and satisfy himself or them. In the final analysis, that "self" - the student - is the most important component in this learning experience.

Self-identification through supervised creative or factual expression, written or oral, is an immeasurable educational accomplishment. Hardly any student - or anyone else - will normally confide in some one he does not know. Mutual respect and confidence remove all psychological barriers. The resulting freedom allows for the creation of a mirror of candid expression wherein tutor and student view themselves,together. The student finds a friend and, perhaps for the first time, he finds himself. This "discovery" could very well be the first step in the direction of what the aestheticians call "coming to terms with life."

Recognition of one's own - very personal - philosophy of life can be the springboard to successful writing achievement. By way of illustration: Recently an instructor of a class in the highly specialized area of creative writing required the group, at their first meeting, to write an impromptu essay presenting an honest analysis of their basic attitudes toward others, and to include description of their own moral and emotional standards and values. His theory - "Paint a tiny portrait of yourself and you will begin to understand the rest of us."

"Heel" or hero; cutthroat or saint; philanderer, philosopher, or whatever we may be, our writing usually reflects an individuality which we label "style."

Psychiatrists effectively employ the therapeutic device of uninhibited self-revelation; and every qualified tutor has to become a kind of unlicensed psychoanalyst. The young tutor who is suddenly thrust into the role of confidant may be startled - even embarrassed - by the sensational revelations appearing occasionally in his students' themes. The following are key lines from several such compositions:

(1) "On my last trip home I overheard Mom and Dad planning a divorce. My next theme will be a personal letter to them, presenting reasons for their not making that final step...."

(2) "I know my father is still alive, somewhere. And someday I hope to meet him for the first time."

(3) "Since last summer I have become 'Lesbian,' 'gay,' 'homosexual' or whatever you want to call it. Right now I'm wondering how my parents will re-act when they find out...."

Editing and revising papers of this type(personal experience) are seldom unwelcome chores. The grammar-and-mechanics phase becomes a means by which to consummate a fulfillment, not the ultimate objective of the exercise. Incidentally, sincerity is the quality which makes a success of most compositions.

Another development, and perhaps the most rewarding, is the manifestation of a new self-confidence stemming from the student's pride in achievement. There is invariably a subtle transformation reflected in his demeanor: chin - a trifle higher;

his walk - a firmer step, or even a slight swagger; conversation - no longer many of those abominable crutches such as "like-uh, like-uh," or "y'know, y'know, y'know, y'know, y'know, y'know, y'know - Y'KNOW!" All this may be accounted for very simply:

When that poor student who at first could barely spell his own name properly - whose first writing samples would have had him laughed out of any sharp class of third-graders(elementary school) - when he at long last writes an interesting theme requiring no editing, no revision, no spelling or workbook exercises, that occasion marks the date of one of the greatest triumphs in his life. He has acquired some mastery of his communicational tools, and he is proud because he is no longer afraid to use the language, on paper or in the presence of even "the high and the mighty." As his expression continues to improve and his vocabulary to expand, the instructor is compensated - thoroughly! In very few other areas of instruction is there opportunity for the teacher to watch his students grow - to observe such tangible, concrete and lasting evidence of progress.

Even the most egocentric of us tire in time of talking about ourselves. Since most writing laboratories are better stocked with theme topics than anything else, variety is no problem. Some systems find news media another source of subject-matter for theme-writing. The topics which follow are typical:

1. An Open Letter to the People of Northern Ireland (on the bloody conflict there)
2. To the Parents of Jewish Athletes Slaughtered at the Olympic Games
3. Where(and Why)Blacks Constitute a Majority in This Country(in lines waiting at the welfare offices)

4. The New Emphasis on Athletics for Women
(Will more muscular women be less feminine?)

"No man is an Iland, intire of itselfe," we know, without this reminder from John Donne. However, before students can be led to live this line, they must be offered opportunity to break out of the hard shell of their narrow little "here and now." Personal-opinion papers about other people may lead these writers to develop genuine concern for the welfare of mankind everywhere:

Anyone writing on the violent religious controversy in Ireland, including the slaughter of little children there, will likely commiserate with survivors of the victims.

Athletes in this country may consider a losing season less tragic when they write about Jewish Olympians who lost their lives.

Essays on Buchenwald and Adolph Hitler could render virtually insignificant a number of "race" problems in this country.

Hypothetically - and somewhat far-fetchedly: An interesting investigation could be conducted on "The Educational Background of Vicious Social Misfits." The research might possibly reveal that few such persons were ever exposed to the therapeutic principles of psychological re-adjustment through agencies like the writing(tutorial)laboratory.

Closely related to humanitarian concern, which may be generated through reading-and-writing experiences, is the matter of aesthetic appreciation:

Too many of us have never seen the beauty of a rose, fresh-blooming on a dewy morning, or the sun rising gloriously to dispell the gloom of night; have never sensed the Omnipotent during a violent storm, with thunder and lightning subsiding in a symbolic rainbow-blending of colors. Such individuals are aesthetically and emotionally dead! Compositions written from literature, paintings, music, sculpture - any of the fine arts - may prove instruments of spiritual resuscitation.

The awesome beauty of a painting like Da Vinci's The Lord's (Last)Supper could inspire essays on topics like "Betrayal and Forgiveness." Interpretations of simple poems and popular songs may awaken dormant sensibilities never before recognized, acknowledged, understood or exercised: Typically illustrative are Joyce Kilmer's "Trees" and the ever-meaningful "I Believe" rendered classic by singer Frankie Lane(quoted below in part):

"Every time I hear a new-born baby cry
Or touch a leaf
Or see the sky,
I know why
I believe...."

Laboratory exploitation of the humanizing influences of the Humanities can only be worthwhile. Students can be aesthetically motivated to "touch a leaf or see the sky" for the first time in their lives, and from a new and highly rewarding perspective.